

L E T T E R S
A D D R E S S E D
T O T H E
COMMITTEE of BELFAST,
O N T H E
PROPOSED REFORMATION
O F T H E
PARLIAMENT of IRELAND,
B Y T H E
Rev. *CHRISTOPHER WYVILL*:
T O W H I C H I S P R E F I X E D,
The FIRST LETTER from THAT COMMITTEE,
W H I C H O C C A S I O N E D
T H I S C O R R E S P O N D E N C E:
A L S O
Mr. WYVILL's ADDRESS
T O T H E
FREEHOLDERS of YORKSHIRE.

Y O R K:

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(The Gift of

Mr. Henry Stevens, Jr.

(Late of the Law School, H. Union.)

Rec^d Apr. 7. 1845.

ADVERTISEMENT.

SOME of the following Letters to the Volunteers of Ireland, are too unimportant to be laid before the Freeholders of Yorkshire, but for this reason only; that in order to guard against misrepresentation, there is a necessity to publish ALL. If any of them were withheld from public inspection on account of their insignificance, the same MALEVOLENCE which could advance a charge of criminality against their Author, before a single letter had been seen in England, might put a different construction upon the concealment, and might treat THIS as a GARBLED PUBLICATION from which the more offensive parts of the Correspondence had been expunged.

To the FREEHOLDERS *of* YORKSHIRE.

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING been appointed by You a Member of your Committee, and having been honoured with your confidence in a station of still greater Trust, as Chairman of that Body, on each of these grounds I hold myself responsible to You for my conduct in every Political Transaction, in which it may be my fortune to take a part. In all such cases, my Constituents have a right to know what my actions have been, and what have been my reasons for acting.

But on the present occasion, I am free to own motives of Prudence are combined with a sense of my Duty to You. The Correspondence I have held with the Volunteers of Ireland may be liable

to MIS-REPRESENTATIONS as injurious to those Generous Men as to myself. Against these, the only means of protection is an unreserved disclosure of *all* my Letters to the Volunteers.—Anxious, also, as I am, not to forfeit your good opinion, I feel that I cannot be happy, even in Your approbation, unless it be founded on a thorough knowledge of what I have done. To Your inspection, therefore, I submit the following Papers ; which contain the Queries proposed to me by the Volunteers of Ireland on the intended Reformation of the Parliament of that kingdom, and the whole of my share in the subsequent Correspondence to which that Communication first gave rise.

The account given by the Volunteers of the Representation of the People of Ireland, exhibits Abuses exactly similar to those which deform the Parliament of Britain ; and which, if not corrected by National Interposition in each Country, appear but too likely to increase ; till they become the destruction of every valuable end for which Parliaments were originally ordained.

But mutilated as the British Constitution is, it still extends to the People Rights and Privileges of
great

great Efficacy for the Preservation of LIBERTY. By a just and warrantable exercise of those Rights, it has been Your endeavour to Restore the Constitution, in some degree, to the Vigour of its ancient State. And notwithstanding repeated disappointments, Your hopes of Success are not extinguished, Your Zeal is not abated; on the contrary, the Revolutions of this eventful year have only served to convince You more clearly that Reformation is necessary, and that, by a steady adherence to Your Pacific Plan, it may finally be attained. Such were Your views in the formation of that Association, in whose prosecution You have persevered with a constant uniformity, with an active but well-governed Zeal, which have gradually lessened the Distrust and Suspicion of Your former Opponents, and induced many of Them, by an extraordinary effort of candour, to concur with You in supporting the objects of Your Plan. These are acquisitions in which You well may triumph; they are the Conquests of Truth, Integrity, and Public Spirit; they are Victories, from which the Victors and the Vanquished will reap equal honour and equal advantage.

For

For myself, “ while I have your approbation, I
 “ stand pledged not to withdraw from the Public
 “ Service ;” and that approbation, I am persuaded,
 will only be given to a constant perseverance in
 Your legal mode of interposition. “ But whenever
 “ I shall see the grounds of the Association shifted,
 “ and measures taken, that, in my apprehension, pro-
 “ bably will lead to violence and commotion ; or
 “ whenever I shall be convinced, from the disposition
 “ of the Country in general, or that of this County
 “ in particular, that no Public Good is to be expected
 “ from Perseverance ; in each of these cases I have
 “ pledged myself TO RETIRE.” These were my
 Declarations at a late and at a former Meeting of
 the County of York ; and permit me to assure You,
 these were not Engagements slightly made, and
 meant as slightly to be broken ; they were the
 effusion of Sentiments which I had long conceived,
 and Promises to which my Conduct must exactly
 correspond. By the breach of these Engagements,
 or the uniform Observance of them, my character
 will be determined in Your judgment, either as
 A BAD CITIZEN—OR AS ONE, WHO
 IN TIMES OF NATIONAL DISTRESS AND
 ALARM ENDEAVOURED TO PREVENT
 COM-

(vii)

COMMOTION, AND POINTED TO LAWFUL
AND PACIFIC MEANS FOR PRESERVING
THE LIBERTIES OF HIS COUNTRY.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your faithful and obedient servant,

C. WYVILL.

YORK, Dec. 30, 1783.

COMMITTEE, AND POINTED TO LAURENCE
AND PACIFIC MEANS FOR PRESERVING
THE LIBERTIES OF HIS COUNTRY.

I have the honor to be

Gentlemen,

Your faithful and obedient servant,

C. W. WILLIAMS

New York, Dec. 10, 1853.

(C O P Y)

AT a Meeting of the Committee of Correspondence, appointed by the Delegates of Forty-five Volunteer Corps, assembled at Lisburn, on the 1st of July instant, held at Belfast the 19th of July, 1783,

Present, *Lieutenant-Colonel SHARMAN in the Chair.*

ORDERED, That the following Letter, signed by the Secretary in the name of this Committee, be forwarded to the highly respected Rev. Mr. Wyvill of Yorkfhire, enclosing a Copy of the Resolutions of the Provincial Meeting of Volunteers of Munster, and of the proceedings of the Forty-five Volunteer Delegates, assembled at Lisburn, on the 1st instant, respecting a Parliamentary Reform; as also, a Copy of the Circular Letter written this day, by this Committee, to the several Corps of this Province.

BELFAST, 19th July, 1783.

REVEREND SIR,

YOUR marked attachment to the Rights of the People and the general prosperity of the British Empire, induce us to address you on the present great and momentous occasion.

A

The

The Spirit of Freedom which pervades all ranks of People in Ireland, with the justice and wise policy of the British Nation, having removed for ever all possible cause of Jealousy between the Sister Kingdoms, and united us to Britain on the Basis of equal Liberty and similar Constitution; it becomes the duty as it is the interest of each Kingdom to assist the other, in their endeavours to restore to its antient purity and vigour, a decayed, enfeebled, and sickly Constitution. In both Nations it is now generally acknowledged that this great object can be attained by no other means but by a Reform of the Representation in Parliament. In England the Measure has for the present miscarried, though supported by so many wise, honest, great, and independent Men, and by a vigorous and glorious exertion of many Shires, particularly that of York. We trust, however, it has miscarried only for a Season, and that the next attempts will prove successful. Ireland has now taken up the Idea, and if we shall be so happy as to see success crown our efforts, we think considerable weight will be thereby added to the endeavours of the Friends of the People in England; the People of the Two Nations united in pursuit of the same important object, must be not only powerful but irresistible. The enclosed papers, which we request you may peruse, will shew how far this country has already gone in determining to procure a more equal Representation; the unanimous resolutions of about Fifteen Thousand Volunteers, already declared in a very few weeks, assure us that the Resolves of the Delegates of Ulster, who are to assemble at DUNGANNON on the eighth of September next, will be no less unanimous; and we well know that what the Volunteers (vast numbers of whom are Freeholders) shall determine on, the other Freeholders and People in general, who are not Volunteers, will adopt and support, by every means in their power—the Aged
Fathers

Fathers cannot differ from their Sons, respecting a matter on which depends every thing that they either hold dear for themselves or their Posterity.

That you may see the very depraved state of our Representation, it is necessary to observe, that out of Three Hundred Members of which our House of Commons consists, Two Hundred and Twenty are returned by Boroughs; those One Hundred and Ten Boroughs are divided into three Classes, 1st, Those where the Right of Election is vested in the Protestant inhabitants at large; 2d, Those where the Right of Election is vested in the Chief Magistrate, Burgeses, and Freeman; 3d, Those where the Right of Election is confined to the Chief Magistrate and Burgeses, frequently not more in number than five or six, and seldom exceeding ten or twelve. Almost all the Boroughs are either venal or corrupt, or implicitly obedient to the Arbitrary Will of their respective Landlords, who dictate to the Electors in the most absolute manner. Those Landlords claim, by prescription, a kind of property in the Boroughs, the patronage of which they transfer by sale, like an estate, and receive from eight to ten thousand pounds for a Borough. A Seat for a Borough is generally sold for two thousand pounds, so that every seven or eight years a Borough brings in four thousand pounds to the patron.

Unhappily for Ireland, our Counties also are too much governed by our Peers and Great Men, whose influence over many of their respective tenants is very great; and this consideration has given rise here to a doubt in the minds of many well-meaning Men as to the propriety of adding to the Number of Knights of the Shire, as generally now two great Families endeavour to divide between them the Seats for the County; the others either remain neuter

or join the Independent Interest. It is alledged, were there six Seats for each County, six great Families would divide them, and, against such a junction, the Independent Freeholders would not be able to make any effectual opposition. May we now entreat you, as a most important favour conferred not only on us but on this kingdom, that you may be pleased to favour us with your sentiments and advice as to the best, the most eligible, and the most practicable mode of destroying, restraining, or counteracting this HYDRA of CORRUPTION, BOROUGH-INFLUENCE; that we may be enabled to lay your opinion before the Provincial Assembly of Delegates at Dungannon; and as our last Meeting for arranging business previous thereunto, is fixed to be on the 20th of AUGUST, we hope you will be so obliging as to forward your reply so as to be with us about that time. Many apologies are due for this long address, and for the very great trouble we have requested you to take; but we are young in Politicks and wish for information from Men of more Wisdom, Experience, and Abilities. This, however, we may venture to assert, that if we can only be directed to the best mode, the Mass of the Inhabitants of Ireland is at this moment so completely alive and sensible to the Necessity of a well-digested Reform, that there cannot remain a doubt, that what it attempts, in conjunction with the virtuous part of England, will be effectual. The several matters on which we have requested your opinion, are thrown into one view in the following Queries:

In order to the Purity of Parliament, and to restore that Constitutional Controul which the Constituent Body should have over the Representative,

1st, Is

1st, Is it necessary that those Boroughs in which the Right of Election is vested in a Few, which, in general, are at the absolute disposal of one or two persons, should be disfranchised, and in their place the County Representatives increased?

2d, The Protestant Inhabitants consist of near one million, who return Three Hundred Members; would it be wise to increase the number of Representatives for the kingdom at large?

3d, A plausible objection, mentioned above, has been raised against an increase of County Representatives; has that argument much weight? And if it has, is it remediable?

4th, Should the Right of Suffrage be extended? If it should, who are the proper objects of that Extension?

5th, In order to guard against Undue Influence, would it be wise to have the Members returned by Ballot?

6th, Would not a limitation of the Duration of Parliaments to a shorter term than eight years have excellent effects? And should it be less than Triennial?

7th, If the abolition of the ENSLAVED Boroughs is necessary, would it be equitable or expedient that they should be purchased by the Nation?

8th, On the whole, what specific mode of Reform, in the Representation of Ireland, best suits your own ideas, considering the

the situation of this country, and what are the steps which you conceive best adapted to effect that Reformation?

We request you may be so good to direct your answer to our Chairman, "Lieutenant-Colonel SHARMAN, Lisburn."

We have the honour to be,

With the most perfect Respect,

SIR, your most obedient

And most humble servants.

Signed, by Order of Committee,

HENRY JOY, jun.

SECRETARY of the FORTY-FIVE.

The Rev. Mr. WYVILL, &c. &c.

Burton-Hall, *near* Bedall, Yorkshire, *Aug.* 3, 1783.

S I R,

ON my return this day from London, I received your two letters, dated the 19th and 26th of July, stating gross abuses in the Representation of the People of Ireland, and proposing for my consideration queries respecting the most advisable mode of application for obtaining effectual redress. The Committee of Correspondence at Belfast, have done me great honour, by asking the opinion of so humble an individual on a subject of such extreme importance to the whole Irish Nation. I am truly sensible also, they may have consulted on this occasion, many persons in this country, better qualified by their experience and superior abilities, to suggest advice which may deserve the attention of the proposed General Meeting of the Volunteer Delegates of Ulster. But neither that reflection, nor the present affliction of my mind from the recent loss of a very near relation, shall discourage me from communicating to the Committee at Belfast my sentiments without reserve. I hold it to be my duty as a MAN, much more as YOUR FELLOW SUBJECT, to contribute the best assistance in my power, inconsiderable as it may be, to promote that political Reformation, without which the happiness of IRELAND cannot be secure. I undertake the performance of this duty with the zeal and alacrity of a most hearty friend;

friend; but since my answer is not desired at Belfast till the 20th instant, it will be deferred for some posts, in order that it may be formed on the fullest and most attentive consideration of the subject which I am able to give it.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

C. WYVILL.

HENRY JOY, jun. Esq;
Secretary of the Committee of
Correspondence at Belfast.

(No. II.)

(No. II.)

Burton-Hall, near Bedall, Aug. 15, 1783.

S I R,

THE inclosed paper contains my answer to the queries which the Committee of Correspondence at Belfast, have done me the honour to propose for my consideration. I beg the favour that you will take the earliest opportunity to lay it before the Committee.

I am, with the greatest respect,

S I R,

Your most obedient servant,

C. WYVILL.

Lieutenant Colonel SHARMAN,
Chairman of the Committee
of Correspondence at Belfast.

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(No. III.)

Mr. WYVILL's Answer to the Queries proposed to him by the Committee of Correspondence at Belfast.

1. **I**N all attempts by a Free People to improve the frame of their Legislature, it seems adviseable, as much as may be possible, to preserve antient foundations; and to suffer every part of the fabrick to stand, which is not absolutely incapable of substantial repair. In my opinion it is unnecessary and inexpedient to disfranchise the populous Boroughs in Ireland, in which the Right of Election is vested in a few persons. In such Boroughs, a due extension of the Right of Suffrage is sufficient to obtain every desirable purpose—but all the little depopulated Boroughs ought certainly to be disfranchised, and their privilege of Parliamentary Representation should be transferred to those populous Districts which are unrepresented, or whose share of Representation is inadequate.

2. If in consequence of the proposed Disfranchisement of the smallest Class of Boroughs, a sufficient share of the Representation can be transferred to the larger Districts, it does not seem necessary that the number of the Irish House of Commons should be increased. The Liberty of the Nation may be well protected by a House of Commons, whose Members do not exceed three hundred, if those Members be firmly connected with the Body of the Nation. But if from the paucity of Boroughs proper to be disfranchised, or from the influence of powerful Men interested to preserve such Boroughs, a sufficient share of the Representation cannot be transferred to the larger Districts;

Districts; the present number of the House of Commons in Ireland, compared with the elective Body, is by no means so large as to forbid any addition of Members. For what secures a Parliament in the interest of the public? DUE ELECTION, AND A SPEEDY RETURN INTO THE COMMON MASS. A Senate thus constituted would instantly feel what the Community felt, and faithfully act according to the wishes of their Constituents. These are the essential requisites in the formation and conduct of a House of Commons, and where they are found, it is of little moment whether the Assembly consist of three hundred persons, or of any larger number not exceeding those limits, beyond which it is not easy to preserve order in a deliberative Assembly. On these grounds, it may be presumed, that no solid objection to an augmentation of the Irish House of Commons could be offered, even if the present Elective Body were incapable of increase: But since the time is perhaps arrived, or may not be very distant, when the Catholics of Ireland might be safely admitted to a participation in the Right of Election, the difficulty wholly vanishes.

3. Where property is very unequally distributed, Aristocratical Influence will be found to operate extensively; and no means can be devised completely to guard the Community against the mischievous consequences of that Influence, without a breach of the laws of property, which hardly ever can be justifiable. But regulations may be framed, by which the danger from an excessive Power in the Aristocracy may be averted, and, in some tolerable degree, that share of Influence may be obtained by the People, without which they cannot possess a Free Constitution, or have any substantial security that the true interests of the Nation will be steadily pursued by Government. Laws extending the Right

of Suffrage to fit Classes of Men—prohibiting Bribery and Expence at Elections—and facilitating the Voters access to the place of polling—these are the most obvious and effectual means by which the Commons may be protected against a domineering Aristocracy, without recurring to the desperate expedient of an Agrarian Law. And since the counties of Ireland are inadequately represented, and since the natural luxury of the Rich, and the growing industry of the Poor, will combine to lessen the Evil complained of, it seems adviseable that the County-Representation should be reinforced; and at the same time, that every proper regulation to check the excess of Aristocratical Influence should be introduced.

4. The Fourth Query has been in some measure answered in reply to the Third. It seems not to admit a doubt that the Right of Suffrage should be extended in Ireland—but the difficult part of the question is, TO WHOM? Conscious as I am how delicate the subject is, I cannot however decline to give my sentiments upon it with plainness and unreserved sincerity.

It is the right of mankind to be governed by their own consent, given personally, or by Representation. On this principle, all just Government has been originally formed. It was the principle on which our Saxon Ancestors founded their Constitution; and though it must be admitted, that from the first introduction of a Deputed Assembly of the People in England, the principle never was strictly adhered to, and that in fact the Right of Election was not universally enjoyed, even before the Statute of Disfranchisement, passed in the eighth year of Henry VI. yet the principle was still appealed to, and, by a LEGAL FICTION, supposed to exist in practice. Such was the happy

happy equality of mankind in the earlier stages of Society; ill exchanged, in my opinion, for the glare and glitter of a more splendid scene, where the loss of the Political Happiness of the MANY is poorly compensated by the Pomp and Magnificence of a FEW INDIVIDUALS.

In countries where property is equally divided, or nearly so, it can hardly be supposed that the unlimited Right of Suffrage may not be established. If such an exception to all Political Experience should occur, the circumstances which could occasion the limitation must be of a very extraordinary nature: But in States where property has been distributed with considerable inequality, some diminution of popular Privileges has usually taken place—and in far the greatest part of the GLOBE, where the extremes of Riches and Poverty almost divide each Community, those Privileges have been trampled under the feet of their Tyrannical Rulers, and scarcely a vestige of them is to be found. Even in these Free Countries of Ireland and Britain, there seems to have been a culpable propensity to contract those Rights to a degree for which there was no sufficient reason. The interests of mankind require that the basis of Society should be broad: The Rules of Justice require that their natural Rights should not be taken away, but upon proof of misusage or Political Delinquency. I am satisfied, therefore, that where the Right of Universal Suffrage has not been found actually inconsistent with the public safety, it ought not to be abridged. But in all cases where the claims of individuals are incompatible with the general good, the Privileges of a part of the Community must be postponed to the welfare of the whole. For the Law of Self-Preservation is to Societies as it is to Individuals, an indefeazable Law; and by that Law Societies are
justi-

justifiable which eject from the full enjoyment of the Rights of Citizens, persons to whom those Rights could not be continued without danger to the Public. The Election Franchise may be considered as both a Privilege and a Trust; and Men who have been found incapable of executing that Trust in a manner not disadvantageous to the Community, are unfit to remain invested with it. That Trust may be as properly taken from such Men, as by the concession of the advocates for its widest extension it may be withheld from women, minors, and persons of some other descriptions. But Men, from whom this Franchise has been taken, ought to be permitted to renounce their allegiance to the State, and to transfer it to another. If in that case they acquiesced under the deprivation without renouncing their allegiance to the State, or even expressing any dissatisfaction, their acquiescence would amount to a tacit acceptance of virtual Representation; and they would still be governed, as they ought to be, by their own consent.

In Communities, in which this deprivation has already taken place, similar reasoning will determine to what classes of Men the Election Franchise ought to be restored, or may justly be refused. It ought to be restored to all who may be reasonably expected to exercise it for the Public Good. This is indisputably clear; and it seems equally certain that it may be justly refused to all to whom it would be unsafe to impart it; whom candour would judge most likely to misuse their privilege, and to be guilty of that political delinquency for which their original deprivation would be justifiable.

These observations are alike applicable to the case of Britain and of Ireland. In both Countries numerous classes of Men have been
deprived

deprived of this Franchise. But the liberal temper of the times, aided in each by some favourable concomitant circumstances, has brought this question to a serious discussion; What Restoration of the Right of Election ought to be proposed, or is fit to be established? The mere inequality of property alone, is by no means a valid objection to the most extensive restoration. For if from the love of Order, Justice, and Liberty prevalent in the Lower Classes, and the meek and unambitious spirit of their Superiors, no material danger were to be apprehended from the influence of a wealthy Aristocracy, or from numerous and frequent Assemblies of the Populace; in such circumstances, notwithstanding the unequal division of property, the right of Suffrage might be safely restored to the excluded Classes, and therefore it ought not to be refused.

Whether Ireland be a Country thus fortunately circumstanced, or not, it behoves the Delegates of Ulster to consider with strict impartiality. In what degree the manners of the Irish People are corrupt, to what extent the Property of their Country is unequally distributed, the Delegates will be most competent to judge. But if Aristocratical Power be found too predominant in the Counties of Ireland, under the present limitations of the Right of Election; as it is stated to be in the Letter of the 19th of July by the Committee of Belfast, the extension of that Right to Persons in a situation of absolute Dependence on the Great, would render their power wholly irresistible. If the Capital contain a numerous and profligate populace, the periodical Assembly of that populace for the purpose of Elections, would too probably produce tumults and all the wild and pernicious effects of frantic insurrection. Evils like these would be more intolerable than those abuses which are now so justly complained of;

of; and unless some effectual remedy were speedily applied to them would lead Ireland through a series of fatal calamities, to the utter ruin of its Constitution.

Prefuming Ireland to be a country nearly in this situation, I cannot venture to recommend the Restoration of Universal Suffrage. In my opinion, the circumstances here described must be considerably altered, before the refusal of that unlimited Privilege can be thought unjust. At present, the utmost length to which the Right of Election there seems safely communicable, is to impart it to every class of Men, who, from the possession of property to some small amount, may be thought likely to exercise their Franchise freely, and for the Public Good. To concede the Right of Suffrage in Ireland beyond that boundary, appears not consistent with National Prudence, or the Safety of the Public; and therefore, in my apprehension, is not required by Justice. In this opinion I am countenanced by the general practice of the Free States of Antiquity; I am supported by that of Modern Europe, and the more recent example of America. In the American Republics, property is more equally divided, and the manners of the people are more simple, orderly, and incorrupt than they are in these kingdoms; and yet, in them, some qualification of property has been thought necessary to intitle inhabitants to the right of voting. In Massachusetts, and some other American States, the Landed Qualification exceeds that of an English Freeholder. I should be still farther confirmed in these sentiments, if the excluded Classes discovered no anxiety to regain this important Privilege, even when it became the object of National Debate. For why should the work of Political Reformation be loaded with great, and, perhaps, insurmountable difficulties, by struggling to impart to the Non-Electors a Franchise

chise which they are neither likely to exercise with discretion, nor solicitous to obtain?

By the Rule here suggested, all Persons paying Taxes within the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs of Ireland would be comprehended among their Voters; and to the County-Electors also would be added Persons holding Land by Copyhold, by Leasehold for Life, or a Term exceeding thirty Years, equal in value to the present Freehold Qualification.

By the same Rule it is understood, that CATHOLICS of similar qualifications in property, would be admitted to the choice of Representatives, together with their PROTESTANT BRETHREN. It must be confessed that this concession to Humanity and Liberal Policy, could not be proposed in Britain with any prospect of Success. But Ireland by granting a complete Toleration to Catholics, has displayed the true spirit of candour and equity. And on this great occasion of reforming its Constitution, the same equitable spirit will naturally lead that Country not to exclude those men from the primary Right of Citizens, by whose assistance its own independence and dignity were obtained. The Catholics of former generations may have been justly degraded from the Class of Electors; because an ATTACHMENT to a FOREIGN POTENTATE, dangerous to the Peace and Welfare of their Country, may then have formed an essential part of their religious Creed. But why should Men, whose religious opinions are now deemed inoffensive to the State, and therefore fit to be tolerated by Law, be thought unfit to concur with their Fellow-Citizens in the Election of Representatives? The Established Religion would be secure as it is at present; because Catholic Voters could not elect Catholic Legislators. However

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their mode of Christianity may be disapproved, however necessary it may be to oppose the re-admission of that System, as the Religion of our Country; and no person disapproves it more completely, or would resist its re-establishment more strenuously than the Writer of this paper; yet surely in matters of merely Civil Concern, the profession of Errors acknowledged to be harmless to the State, ought not to be a disqualification. Surely Christians of every sect may be admitted to enjoy those political privileges, from which persons untaught by any Religion are not excluded. If on this occasion the Right of Suffrage should be extended to Catholics, let them receive the indulgence, not from the insidious clemency of a Court, but from the friendship and magnanimity of their Protestant Fellow-Subjects, and the Peace, the Liberty of Ireland will be unhurt by the concession.

5. Elections by Ballot seem to be unadvisable. In places where no undue Influence can be exerted, the concealment of the Ballot is totally unnecessary. But where that Influence is predominant, it ought to be resisted, not by a practice encouraging cowardly dissimulation, and breach of promise; but by open and honourable means; by means consonant with Truth, Integrity, and the courageous Spirit of Liberty.

6. The duration of Parliaments ought to be limited to a shorter term than eight years. If it should be found as practicable to obtain Annual as Triennial Parliaments, the preference in point of efficacy seems due to Annual Parliaments. But the beneficial effects of Triennial, or of Annual Parliaments will not be so sensibly felt, till the Representation has been meliorated, and Elections have been rendered incorrupt and unexpensive.

7. It

7. It would be expedient that a satisfactory compensation should be given by the Nation to the Proprietors of those Boroughs which may be abolished. If this were understood to be the intention of the Public, a less animated opposition to the Disfranchisement of Boroughs might be expected. But a more harsh mode of Reformation would disgust and exasperate Individuals; which would be extremely imprudent, when an expence, slight to a whole kingdom, might purchase their acquiescence, and preserve general harmony. Undoubtedly, a compensation is what strict justice does not enjoin; the Nation has an absolute right to revoke Privileges which are become injurious to its welfare; but in the view of equity, as well as that of policy, this more lenient mode of correcting abuses which time may have introduced, without any marked criminality of the present Proprietors, seems to be preferable.

8. From the answers which have been returned to the former Queries, my opinion respecting the eighth and last Query, in some measure might be collected. But the reply to the most important Question of them all shall not be less explicit than those which have been already given. If then I had the honour to be delegated to attend the Meeting at Dungannon, my present ideas on the subject would lead me

1st, To recommend with all possible earnestness, the abolition of every small and decayed Borough, and the gift of a reasonable compensation to every person immediately affected by that act; with permission to the disfranchised Electors to vote at Elections for their respective Counties:

2d, To propose the re-inforcement of the Representation by transferring to the Counties, the Capital, and considerable unre-presented Towns, if there be any such in Ireland, the Members taken from the disfranchised Boroughs; and also by adding to them as many new Members as might be necessary clearly to turn the balance of Legislative Power in favour of the Counties, principal Cities, and Towns, which form the Body of the Nation, and in which the strength of the Irish Democracy resides:

3d, To suggest the utility of extending the Right of Suffrage to all Persons paying Taxes in the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs; to all Copyholders and Leaseholders for life, or a term exceeding thirty years, the yearly value of whose estates shall be at least forty shillings; and also the propriety of admitting Christians of every denomination to the equal exercise of that most important right of a Citizen:

4th, To advise a shorter duration of Parliaments, preferring Annual Parliaments to Triennial, if equally attainable:

5th, And for securing the advantages of these measures in their full extent, to recommend the strictest prohibition of bribery and expence at Elections, and regulations facilitating to the respective voters the exercise of their franchise.

Such are the improvements which appear to my mind, most practicable, safe, and efficacious, in the present state of Ireland, to restore to **THE PEOPLE UNARMED, THEIR JUST AND NECESSARY CONTROUL OVER THE REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY.** To some of the Delegates at Dungannon, these Propositions might appear not extensive enough. To many more,

more, perhaps, they might seem too extensive to be at once adopted with prudence. Having, therefore, offered these Propositions to the Meeting, I should think it ill became me to adhere to them with pertinacity. On the contrary, it would be more suitable to my very limited experience and imperfect knowledge of Irish affairs, and also more conducive to the success of the Great Cause, to submit my opinion with deference to better informed judgments; and to accede to a less extensive plan for a substantial Reformation of Parliament, in favour of which a more General Concurrence of the Volunteers might be probable. For that is the best Plan of Reformation, which is the most effectual that is likely to be attained.

The means for obtaining those regulations, or other improvements which may be deemed more salutary, are sufficiently obvious. To restore a declining Constitution, is the duty, the interest, and the peculiar office of the Collective Body. Self-Reformation is an odious task to Corrupt Assemblies of Men, as it is to Profligate Individuals. A Degenerate Parliament will never seriously engage in that business, but from the impulse of the People. By their active zeal the work of Reformation must be begun—by their firmness and perseverance it must be finished. In a more tolerable condition of Parliament it would be sufficient to state an abuse, and of its own accord an honest House of Commons would immediately apply the proper correction: But when the mischief lies in the frame and disposition of Parliament itself, it behoves the People not only to specify their Grievance, but to point out on what principle, and to what extent they expect redress. For if the popular complaint be well founded, Parliament cannot be qualified to judge for the People with due impartiality, nor disposed spontaneously to grant that Mode of

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Reformation which may appear best adapted to promote their happiness. Hence proceeds the principal difficulty of this great enterprize. When the Claim of Independence was the object of pursuit, there was but one simple Proposition before each Provincial Meeting; and in that Proposition every Irishman was agreed. If the Volunteer Assemblies should deliberate a-part on the General Question only, whether a Reformation of Parliament be expedient, there is little reason to apprehend any material diversity of opinion would arise. But if the Question to be considered, should be, what specific Plan of Reformation is most fit to be proposed to Parliament?—The discussion of that Proposition, in many distinct Assemblies, might unhappily divide the Volunteers. The Reformation of Parliament is an ample field of speculation, in which the sentiments of wise and good men may be widely different: it is a subject of the highest practical importance on which those various sentiments may be maintained with warmth and eagerness. In the progress of those disputes the Provincial Meetings might form different opinions—they might be heated—they might be alienated—the ill offices of artful and interested Men might increase the disgust, till the formation of a General Union in favour of any specific Plan, would become exceedingly difficult, if not wholly impracticable. In order to guard against so fatal a disunion, it seems adviseable, if the specific Plan ought to originate from the People, that A GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES from every part of Ireland should meet, and determine what that specific Plan should be. By such a Meeting, the Union of the Volunteers might be completely preserved; and the application from THAT Meeting for an effectual Redress of Parliamentary Abuses would be presented to Parliament with the weight and authority of the whole Collective Body. It is needless to add that their Requisition must be complied with.

Such

Such is the judgment which I have formed on the most impartial consideration of the Queries transmitted for my opinion by the Committee of Belfast. I feel myself much honoured by the Gentlemen who have called forth my sentiments on this momentous occasion; by imposing that honourable task upon me they have committed to my hands an important Trust, which I am bound to execute with scrupulous fidelity, with conscientious sincerity. I am but too well convinced that what I have been able to suggest, deserves not much of their attention. But the opinion now given has been formed and delivered under a sense of duty. And if this Communication offer nothing else which may be fortunate enough to meet their approbation, yet I am confident the Delegates of Ulster will approve the freedom and integrity of my answer.

As a MAN I sincerely wish the enjoyment of Liberty, in its most ample extent, to MEN in every climate and country; but as a Fellow-Subject I am deeply and more peculiarly interested in the Welfare and Happiness of IRISHMEN. When the Volunteers of Ireland successfully asserted the honour and independence of their Country, I rejoiced at its emancipation from an injurious controul. When they abolished Persecution, and gave Peace and Security to Millions of their oppressed Brethren, my heart concurred and approved the Deed. When they checked the corrupt profusion of the Public Money, I joined with every Virtuous Man in applauding this prelude to a more important Reformation. To restore a sinking Constitution is their last and greatest labour. It is a task, whose difficulty can only be exceeded by the immense advantage resulting from the performance. Nothing else can give permanent security to the freedom and prosperity of Ireland. When the zeal and spirit by which the Volunteers

lunteers gained those benefits to their Country, shall be relaxed, unless a Radical Reformation of Parliament shall have been first accomplished, the benefits themselves will not be of long duration: They will be lost again, or they will be left under circumstances of Public Distress, in which enjoyment will be impossible. The mischiefs of a factious and corrupt Government will be felt once more—Ministerial Profusion will again seduce the Senate and impoverish the Community. In this state of things, Liberty will be precarious, and Commerce and Industry will be undone. And then, when the poor Catholic is starving for want of employment, Toleration itself will be to him a comfort of little avail. Even the joy excited in the public mind by the acquisition of Independence will soon sink and be lost in the superior sense of domestic misery. But I trust a different, and a far happier scene, is just ready to open upon Ireland. From the Vigour and Virtue of the Irish People, conducted by the Wisdom of their Delegates, a substantial Reformation of Parliament, with every national blessing in its train, may soon be expected. Let them but persevere in the same spirited, temperate, and legal conduct which hitherto has marked their character with honour—let them be firm—let them be unanimous—and in this just and necessary undertaking, as in all the rest, THE VOLUNTEERS OF IRELAND will command that success which they so well deserve.

C. WYVILL.

Burton-Hall, *near* Bedall, *Aug.* 22, 1783.

S I R,

ACcording to your desire, my answer to the Queries of the Committee of Correspondence at Belfast, was transmitted to Lieutenant-Colonel Sharman at Lisburn on the 15th inst. But wishing to guard against a miscarriage, which in the hurry of a General Election may be possible, I take the liberty to trouble you with a duplicate of my answer.

The Committee of Yorkshire is expected to meet about the end of September, when your letters, and the other papers communicated by your respectable Committee, will be laid before the Yorkshire Gentlemen. I am firmly persuaded they will rejoice at the Noble Spirit of Reformation which has arisen in Ireland; they will sincerely wish to their worthy Fellow-Subjects complete success: I trust also, they will be most ready to co-operate with them in any legal mode which can be devised, mutually to assist each other, in the laudable and necessary undertaking to obtain a substantial Reformation of Parliament, in the respective kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

C. WYVILL.

HENRY JOY, Esq;
Secretary to the Committee of
Correspondence at Belfast.

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(No. V.)

Burton-Hall, *October 11, 1783.*

S I R,

AFTER having transacted the business which the Meeting at York on the first inst. had intrusted to my care, I take the earliest opportunity to acknowledge your favour of the 12th of September; and to offer to your respectable Committee the inclosed explanation of my sentiments, regarding the re-admission of Catholics to the Right of Suffrage.

The papers which I have had the honour to receive from you, together with my replies, were laid before the Yorkshire Committee on the first instant; and although no formal Resolution was passed upon the occasion, yet the Communication was received with every mark of cordiality; and I should not do justice to their sentiments if I did not represent the Yorkshire Gentlemen as zealous well-wishers to the Legal Exertions of the People of Ireland, for the RESTORATION of their CONSTITUTION.

For myself, I do most sincerely rejoice at the wise measures adopted by the Meeting at DUNGANNON on the eighth of September. I trust they will secure Unanimity to the Volunteers of Ireland, and enable the National Convention, with ease and regularity, to accomplish a safe, but radical Reformation of the Irish Parliament. I am, S I R,

With great Respect,

Your most obedient servant,

HENRY JOY, jun. Esq.

C. WYVILL.

POSTSCRIPT *to Mr. Wyvill's ANSWER to the*
QUERIES, &c.

IT seems to be admitted in Ireland, that the Right of Suffrage ought to be extended to men of every class and denomination, as far as the Public Safety will conveniently allow. But the Volunteers of Ulster, when they resolved to stop there, acted with much wisdom; at least in my opinion, to pass that limit would not be magnanimity—it would be indiscretion and temerity.

From the first communication of the Committee of Belfast, it had been collected that the Catholics of Ireland out-number the Protestants, in the proportion of two to one; but the weight of property in the Protestant scale was conceived to exceed that of the Catholics in a much greater proportion. Hence the supposition that the Right of voting might be granted alike to Catholics and Protestants, of a certain Qualification in property, without transferring to Catholics an Influence in Elections that would be dangerous to the State. It is extremely probable that this calculation may be erroneous; but fortunately, an effectual method has been taken by the Meeting at DUNGANNON to procure authentic information on the subject, to be laid before the intended NATIONAL CONVENTION: For if on a Question of such infinite importance, a doubt remain on the minds of liberal and enlightened men, that doubt ought to be cleared up in a satisfactory manner. When the proportion between the Protestants and Catholics of Ireland shall be ascertained by accurate

estimates of their comparative numbers and opulence, then it may be determined with due precision, how far the Right of Suffrage may be safely extended.

That no extension of that Right can be safe, which would give to this Sect of Christians A PARLIAMENT AT THEIR DEVOTION, seems too evident to need any discussion. I shall not scruple to add, that in my judgment, no extension of it can be safe, which by placing Protestants and Catholics on nearly a level situation of power, would open a prospect to Catholics of the future re-establishment of their mode of Religion. That would tend directly to revive those religious animosities, and to excite that spirit of rivalry and eager contention, which, in the last century, distracted these Islands; and which, after having deluged them both with blood, at last, were happily calmed and soothed into tranquility under a Protestant System of Government. The maintenance of that establishment is the interest of every friend to the peace of these kingdoms; in that more especially, which in the principles and practice of Toleration has taken a Noble Lead: And every well-wisher to the perpetual CONNECTION of Ireland and Britain, on the footing of EQUAL LIBERTY, under the same Prince, and similar Constitutions, and if possible, to their still closer UNION, must be anxious to guard against events, by which that UNION may be impeded, or that CONNECTION may be infringed. It might be invidious, and it is certainly superfluous to enlarge upon these reasons for a cautious re-admission of Catholics to the Right of Voting. But having acknowledged the necessity of this caution, I wish to exhort the Volunteers of ULSTER not to be deterred by vain, imaginary fears—but to impart to their Catholic Brethren, the Right of Citizens, in that degree which may now be safely communicable

cable—and so to extend their Concessions hereafter, as future experience may prove to be compatible with the Peace, the Liberty, and the established Government of Ireland:

I cannot close this paper, without declaring my conviction, that the measures which have been hitherto adopted by the popular Meetings in Ireland and Britain, for the Recovery of their respective Rights, are strictly conformable to Law and the Constitution. But however legal or constitutional they may be, they are unusual measures, out of the ordinary course of the Constitution, and only fit to be resorted to in cases of great necessity. If, therefore, by this extraordinary interposition, a substantial Renovation of the Constitution shall be obtained either in Ireland or in Britain, it will be expedient, in my judgment, that no farther concessions from Parliament be pressed, in this mode, by the Collective Body in either this or that kingdom, till the effect of the New Regulations shall have been fairly tried, and popular Interference shall have been found once more to be indispensably necessary.

In Britain, my opinion to this effect has been already declared; and I should be much deficient in the candour and fidelity which are due from me to the Volunteers of Ulster, if adhering too scrupulously to the letter of their Queries, I should decline to offer to their consideration, what, perhaps, may be materially conducive to the Peace and Happiness of their Country.

C. WYVILL.

Burton-Hall, *November 13, 1783.*

S I R,

I AM much honoured by your letter of October 11, conveying to me the Thanks of the Ulster Committee of Correspondence, for Communications which they are pleased to think useful, on the subject of a Parliamentary Reform. I beg leave to trouble you, to assure the Committee, I value their approbation very highly; and I shall ever consider it as one of the happy circumstances of my life, that in their opinion, I have been able to contribute, in however small a degree, to the promotion of IRISH LIBERTY.

I have read, with singular satisfaction, the accompanying account of the Proceedings at Dunganon, and the Specific Plan which is intended to be laid before the NATIONAL CONVENTION, now assembled at DUBLIN. For the result of the Deliberations of that Meeting I look with a confident expectation of success, but not unmixed with anxiety. The interposition of the People by an extraordinary National Delegation, though perfectly legal and regular, and absolutely necessary to restore their Free Constitution, is yet a new and an untried measure; for the right conduct of which, PRECEDENT can furnish no assistance. But without laying too much stress on the difficulties which may arise from Chance, or the artful management of Men who are Secret Enemies to the Reformation of Parliament, I cannot consider the mere magnitude of the undertaking without solicitude. On the wisdom and moderation of the Delegates depend
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not only the Liberties of Ireland, but in some measure the expectation and success of Popular Assemblies in Britain, and in other Countries, in times, perhaps, far beyond the Age in which we live. Hence, on this momentous occasion, anxious thoughts will unavoidably occur; but when I recollect the Prudence and Vigour displayed by the Volunteers in the course of their arduous Struggle for the Public Weal; when I consider the Justice of their Claims, and the Unanimity which appears to pervade the General Body, my apprehensions vanish; and the Success of the NATIONAL CONVENTION seems not to admit a doubt.

That the event may happily correspond with this expectation is the fervent wish and prayer of, S I R

Your most obedient humble servant,

C. WYVILL.

Lieutenant-Colonel SHARMAN.

(No. VIII.)

Burton-Hall, *December 2, 1783.*

S I R,

I FIND it necessary to guard against Mis-representation by publishing all my letters addressed, through Lieutenant-Colonel SHARMAN and YOURSELF, to the Committee at ~~Belfast~~. But before the publication of these papers I wish to know, whether the Committee have any objection to the appearance of their part of the Correspondence at the same time. By an unreserved disclosure of the whole Correspondence, our views and intentions will be more distinctly understood, and the means of fixing injurious imputations on the Committee or myself, will be more effectually removed. For these reasons, I wish to publish my letters, accompanied by the papers which I have had the honour to receive from your respectable Committee. But if in their opinion, inconveniences which are not foreseen by me, might result from the production of their letters, I trust they will consider this request as instantly withdrawn.

I am, S I R, with great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

C. WYVILL.

HENRY JOY, jun. Esq; Belfast.